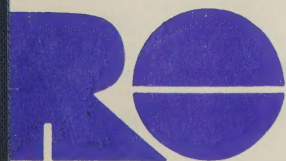


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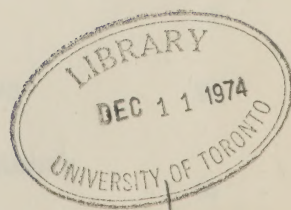
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GREATER RIVERDALE ORGANIZATION



Greater Riverdale Organization

Reflections on the Project as a Model for
Community Development

by: Don Keating



Ontario

Office on Community Consultation

Ministry of Community and Social Services

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About the Author...


Don Keating, is a native of Manitoba. He attended United College in Winnipeg, receiving his B.A. in 1949, and his Bachelor of Divinity in 1956.

Mr. Keating has had extensive experience in community organization work, both in Canada and the U.S.A.

After 12 years of regular Parish work in mining, rural and urban areas of Manitoba, he spent five years in Chicago as a community organizer working directly on a number of projects, including involvement with such renowned community organizers as Tom Gaudette and Saul Alinsky.

Mr. Keating came to Toronto in 1969 and served as Staff Director of the Greater Riverdale Organization from its inception until August 31, 1973.

He is currently working towards a Masters Degree in Environmental Studies at York University in Toronto.



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THE STORY OF THE GREATER RIVERDALE ORGANIZATION

FOREWORD

This case study was prepared by Mr. Don Keating at the request of the Office of Community Consultation, Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Keating describes what he calls, the "mass based community organizing" approach, the philosophy behind this concept and how it has been applied during the five-year history of the Greater Riverdale Organization.

This paper is the second in a series of case studies intended to describe a variety of community development approaches based on actual situations in Ontario.

The views expressed in this document are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

I THE STORY OF THE GREATER RIVERDALE ORGANIZATION

A. Background: Urban Renewal in Don Mount

The history of the Greater Riverdale Organization, or GRO, is one of mass-based community organizing in Riverdale. Riverdale is an area of Toronto east from the Don River to Coxwell Avenue. The story has its beginnings in a crisis that hit Riverdale in the mid 60's when people in Don Mount, an area in the southwest corner of Riverdale, were expropriated as a result of an Urban Renewal Project undertaken jointly by the three levels of government. As the residents resisted their displacement, they were joined in protest by local clergy and politicians. As a result of their anger and their feeling of powerlessness in dealing with this situation, the East Don Urban Coalition was formed.

A
Community
crisis

B. East Don Urban Coalition

The East Don Urban Coalition was comprised of five clergy, the president of a local ratepayer's group and the director of a community centre. These seven were determined to see that residents in the area gained the opportunity to become involved in a community organizing process. A number of politicians were also concerned that people in Riverdale should become involved in decisions and plans for their community. In 1969, the Board of Control of the City of Toronto through its Development Department made a \$14,000 grant to the East Don Urban Coalition.

Sponsoring
body:
7 people
from
7 groups

Seed money

The four pastors of local churches committed themselves to donating \$500.00 each, and the fifth as director of a training project, gave assurance of a staff person for training. An agreement was made that the East Don Urban Coalition would hire an experienced organizer to initiate a community organizing process in Riverdale. On October 1, 1969 an experienced organizer was hired. In November, a trainee joined the staff and in February 1970 a second trainee was hired when The United Church of Canada gave a grant of \$3,000 to the Coalition.

Staff

During the first six months, over a dozen neighbourhood groups were formed to deal with problems such as roaches, maintenance in public housing projects, and delinquent absentee landlords. As a result of the creation of these groups it seemed time for the seven member coalition to broaden its base. Instead of expanding its membership, it began afresh so residents and agencies could join in making a fresh start together.

Early actions

C. Riverdale Community Organization

That new beginning was made in March of 1970 when leaders from the interested new neighbourhood groups as well as professionals from schools, agencies and churches were brought together upon invitation of the East Don Urban Coalition. They identified community problems and formed the temporary Riverdale Community Organization as a means of dealing with these problems. The East Don Urban Coalition became part of the finance committee of this new organization. Now instead of seven people from seven groups there were 80 people from some 40

Broadening

groups working together to ensure that people in Riverdale had an opportunity to organize.

Victories
in 1970

Then came two years of actions and victories on scores of issues — 80 during the first year. In the summer of 1970, two student organizers came on staff for three months, funded through S.O.S. (Summer of Service) by the Federal Department of Secretary of State and the Ontario Department of the Provincial Secretary and Citizenship at \$550.00 each.

Financial
crisis:
1971

During the second year, R.C.O. went through one long financial crisis. To deal with it, the R.C.O. executive members led the way with substantial individual loans to the organization, and by organizing a fund raising dinner and a monthly 50/50 Draw Club. M.P.'s, M.P.P.'s and some aldermen used their influence to have a Federal grant approved. Friends of R.C.O., dozens of individuals, three departments of The United Church of Canada, a University professor, a local Roman Catholic pastor, the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto, and even the United Community Fund with assistance from the Family Service Association — all made contributions.

Victories
1971

Although the R.C.O. executive was preoccupied with the question of funding, the organization continued to function smoothly. Two full-time community organizers and one organizer-trainee were placed with R.C.O. by the YMCA.

Kinds of
issues

In these first two years of organizing in Riverdale a variety of issues were dealt with including: 26 Public Works; 14 Parks and Recreation; 12 involving other departments of City and Metro Toronto governments; 18 Absentee landlord problems; 15 Policy/Community; nine relating to Ontario Housing Corporation; three recorded Welfare issues; 15 Business practices; three Toronto Transit Commission; four in which aldermen were specifically brought in; and one each relating to eleven other centres of power.

Major
Victories: 1972

In 1972, there were united efforts by many street organizations in Riverdale and groups to gain:

- (a) Free overnight parking — a saving of well over \$100,000 per year in overnight parking tickets.
- (b) A high-rise development halted at Pape and Gerrard until density specifications of the developers were brought into line with demands from residents in the area neighbourhood group.
- (c) A bus service on Jones Avenue after only three months of organized efforts proved the effectiveness of organizing, in contrast to two separate efforts by Aldermen and by unorganized residents with petitions which previously had been unable to achieve results.
- (d) A beautiful park on the old Dunlop site, now called the Jimmy Simpson Park after an east end born Mayor of Toronto.
- (e) The "quickest turn-around ever seen in Toronto's City Executive Committee" (according to a city reporter), as residents around Withrow Park organized and persuaded the Executive to reverse a decision to put a parking lot in the Park.

D. Steering Committee for a Community Convention

The first stage in mass based community organizing is building the organization. The financial crisis of 1971 delayed the development of the Riverdale Community Organization to its founding convention by at least a year. However R.C.O.'s application to Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation was approved and the organization received about \$28,000 for the period May 1 to December 31, 1972. On the basis of the grant approved and the victories gained by the middle of 1972, the R.C.O. voted to dissolve and instead become the steering committee for a founding convention. The executive of R.C.O. called on 100 people from 48 groups to form the steering committee. A special effort was made to reach cultural groups in Riverdale so the new organization would be truly representative of the area.

A year of
money
staff and
issues

On September 12, the steering committee held a mass meeting of over 500 people from 83 groups in the Riverdale Collegiate auditorium. There were large delegations of Chinese, Greeks and Italians. This mass meeting voted to organize a founding convention in November and set up seven convention committees. The target was 800 to 1,000 people from 80 to 100 groups.

500 people
from
83 groups

During the next six weeks, the convention committees swung into action so all of their work would be completed by the deadline of two weeks before the Convention date.

E. Founding Convention: Greater Riverdale Organization

On Sunday, November 12, 1972 Monarch Park High School was the scene of Canada's first Community Convention when about 1,000 people who live, work, worship or go to school in Riverdale were called to order at 2:20 p.m. There were 89 delegations from 75 groups.

1,000
people from
75 groups

In the midst of an array of signs and slogans in English, Chinese, East Indian, Greek and Italian, the multi-cultural Community Convention began complete with simultaneous translations in Chinese, Greek and Italian.

Multi cultural
founding
Convention

One significant moment was the seating of the delegations. Delegations consisted of at least 10 people each. As the chairman of the membership and credentials committee called out the names of the delegations present, each delegation answered in unison. When the motion that the delegations be seated was made, and the vote taken, a thousand buoyant "yeas" filled the auditorium. The chairman pounded the gavel and said, "I declare the first annual Community Convention of Greater Riverdale is thus constituted". The organization had given birth to itself.

An organization
gives birth to
itself

Another moment came with the approval of Article I of the Constitution: "The name of this organization shall be the Greater Riverdale Organization hereinafter referred to as GRO", and the Chairman declared: "You now have a name!"

STRUCTURE OF GRO: HOW GRO FUNCTIONS

The annual COMMUNITY CONVENTION is the body from which all power derives in GRO. It consists of delegations from all member organizations. Each can send as many delegations as it wishes. It amends the constitution, elects officers, decides on the action program and approves budget for the organization.

The DELEGATES ASSEMBLY meets monthly and is the power of GRO throughout the year. It consists of four voting delegates and all alternates from each member organization. In practice, almost all of the Delegates Assembly meetings are public meetings at which everyone present can vote. The D.A. strikes the action committees, governs finances, prepares for convention and is the forum for community voice and action.

The EXECUTIVE COUNCIL meets at least monthly and provides leadership and direction to the organization. It consists of all elected officers plus action committee chairmen and vice-chairmen. It sets the agenda for and is accountable to the Delegates Assembly.

The ACTION COMMITTEES organize united actions on specific issues as passed by the annual convention and as others may arise during the year. Gro exists for action. The Action Committees are the place where people in the community meet the powers that be with the strength of a united and organized body of citizens to try and take their share of the decision making that affects their lives.

STAFF is part of the structure of GRO inasmuch as a mass-based community organization cannot function without staff any more than it can function without people.

Conference
Proceedings

In a short period of time, the delegates amended and approved GRO's constitution, approved a budget, voted on an action program for the ensuing year, and elected 25 officers.

The convention delegates included not only good representation from concerned Riverdale citizens, but also a broad spectrum of ethnic and cultural groups from the Greater Riverdale area.

Costs defrayed

The convention expenses were met through convention fees, proceeds from an ad book, and \$1,500 grant from the United Church of Canada to cover the cost of simultaneous translation services and a \$700.00 value in donations from the then Community Development Branch of the Province of Ontario.

F. Greater Riverdale organization 1973

Major GRO
victories 1973

During 1973, committees and groups in GRO handled a series of problems. These included:

(a) The Business Practices Committee was successful in pressuring the Toronto

City Council to give notice of eviction to a dairy operating on residential streets as a legal non-conforming use. This had been attempted before but the group working under the aegis of GRO was the only one to be successful.

- (b) The Transportation Committee (Jones Avenue group) was successful in pressuring the Toronto Transit Commission into assuring them of extending their necessary bus service on Jones Avenue to include evenings and weekends.
- (c) A Chinese Community group arranged for 120 Chinese language books to be placed in the Riverdale Library – a first in Toronto, and at two schools persuaded school officials to agree to print school-to-Chinese parents communications in Chinese.
- (d) A Greek Parents Association, after a lengthy struggle was successful in securing the adoption of a policy of daytime Greek language from the Toronto Board of Education, including language instruction at two schools in Riverdale; details were to be negotiated with the individual schools by the G.P.A.
- (e) A neighbourhood group pressured the City of Toronto to buy a warehouse property and build a park.
- (f) Another group was able to have a young developer re-design his plans for 14 houses to meet local residents' views about good planning.
- (g) Yet another group forced the Committee of Adjustments of the City of Toronto to order a junk dealer to clear unsightly trucks from his property within 48 hours.

PEOPLE IN RIVERDALE

Riverdale is a community of working people and has changed, since the World War II, from a predominantly Anglo Saxon to a multicultural community as those who benefited from the rapid economic growth of the post war period moved to the suburbs, and as new ethnic immigrant families moved into Riverdale.

Fewer numbers of young middle class professional families also came into the area in response to the increasing cost of housing in the traditional middle class areas of Toronto.

Some families on welfare, who lost housing accommodation outside of Riverdale to urban re-development, also moved into the area renting from absentee landlords. Others were later able to take advantage of the lower rents offered by new public housing projects in Riverdale.

In August of 1973, Metro Toronto Council announced that the preferred alignment of the proposed Scarborough Expressway would now cut through Riverdale, following the present route of the CN railroad. Action on this issue began as small groups along the proposed route were initially organized during July and brought together at the end of the month in a Rally of 175 people, meeting with the four aldermen of their two wards. During August, these 175 people went back to their

Scarborough
Expressway
through
Riverdale?

Expressway rally
of 750 people

areas, organized larger meetings and as a result, mobilized a mass meeting of 750 people in Monarch Park School auditorium at the end of August to confront Metro politicians.

Financial crisis
1973

At the time these actions were being taken, GRO funds ran out. To meet this crisis, GRO cut back on its major staff, organized some holding actions and set out to raise money.

Problems destroy
but can be used
to build

The story of Greater Riverdale Organization began with a problem that destroyed a neighbourhood because it did not have an organization strong enough to protect itself. The organization developed as people stopped giving their problems away so others could solve them and achieve more power, and started using their problems to build their own influence and power. Gradually, residents in Riverdale recognized the relationship between solving community problems and maintaining the power of a mass based community organization.

II UNIQUE FEATURES OF GREATER RIVERDALE ORGANIZATION

There are a number of unique features of mass-based community organizing that distinguish it from other styles.

A. Twofold Goal

Twofold goal of
GRO

The basic feature of organizing in Riverdale is GRO's twofold goal of organizing:

- (a) to achieve results, and,
- (b) to build organization.

The significance of this two-fold goal can be illustrated by contrasting it with the goals of other styles of organizing:

Protesters protest

The goal of "protest" organizing is to protest. When people are brought together to protest, they have achieved their goal. If they usually lose, they have at least proven one of their basic reasons for existing, namely that the system is deficient.

Ratepayers get
results

The goal of "results" organizing is results. It doesn't matter who gets the results as long as they are achieved. In these instances, people align and use their contacts with people in power to solve problems for them. Therefore, when they are through and have achieved the desired results, they still haven't built an organization; they still don't have power. These groups are dependent on "experts". Traditional ratepayers groups are an example of "results" organizing.

Community
developers get
citizens
participating

Groups that emphasize "citizen participation" achieve their goal when they succeed in involving great numbers of people. But this usually means participation without power. That is, local people don't have the power of decision making. They are consulted but the power of decision still rests with an outside or elected body. Community development, in the historical sense, grew out of government programs in under-developed areas (both foreign and rural) and is typical of the citizen participation style.

In mass-based community organizing (M.B.C.O.) it matters who finally achieves results because people soon learn that whoever solves the problem increases his strength. In GRO, its leaders recognize that people can win issues without necessarily building a strong organization (by using someone else's power - like an alderman's) but that you can't build a strong organization without winning. The two-fold goal is to use issues to build power, by winning results.

M.B.C.O.
builds power
by getting results

B. Method: Confrontation

The goal leads to another unique feature - the method of achieving results. The goal is to build a strong organization. Therefore, instead of simply protesting and presenting the problems to someone else for solution, the people sit down, determine the specifics of the problems, decide what improvements they want and then force the issue by directly confronting the person responsible for the problem. The mood of the confrontation varies widely, depending on the nature of the problem, the feelings those affected have regarding it, and the response of the person being held accountable.

Direct action

C. Problem Identification

Yet another unique feature is the manner in which problems become identified. As an organization develops and becomes known to the community people phone in, come to the office or a meeting with a problem. But in the early stages, problems are usually identified as staff go door-to-door asking people, "What are the problems and improvements that you are concerned about?" In this way, residents who are likely to come to a meeting are also identified. Leaflets inviting residents to a meeting are distributed to every door, thereby reinforcing personal contact and a new interest group is formed.

People decide
the problems

D. Role of Staff and Teams of Local Leaders

Staff do not impose issues, are not eligible for office, do not solve problems for people and do not act as middlemen. The key is a workable relationship between staff and teams of local leaders. This begins with the contract between the executive and the staff director. In mass-based community organizing, such as GRO, the executive council has the responsibility, the power (by constitution) to hire the staff director. The staff director is accountable to them; he is not accountable to the Delegates Assembly (the monthly meeting). The staff director hires the rest of the staff who are accountable to him; they are not accountable to the Executive Council. This is one of the keys to success. It is easier for the executive to control one person than many and the added responsibility given to the staff director gives greater incentive for hiring and training staff that can do the job effectively and fulfill the contract. Realistically, it takes four full-time organizers and a secretary/bookkeeper to build and maintain an organization in an area the size of Riverdale. Of the four organizers, at least the staff director should have had the experience of being an organizer in a mass based community organization from its beginning through to its founding convention. The other three could be trainees.

Key is relation-
ship: a contract

Accountability

Number of staff
needed

Teams of leaders

Effective method:
ask questions

Skills are learned

A problem solver
is

With a clear understanding of the contract and accountability the next step is to establish a close working relationship between staff and teams of local leaders. This relationship is one in which the staff person works basically by asking questions and by being supportive of the leaders. Staff are, by design, not in a position to tell people what to do, and they don't. However, they do voice opinions and reasons for them but if they hope to encourage leaders and to develop an effective organization they will use everything to ensure that local leaders express their own ideas, test them, modify them, fight for them, make their own decisions and carry them out. Without this relationship, little good can come except where an emerging leader has a natural instinct for organizing. Unfortunately, these are few and far between. For most of us, good organizing skills are learned from experience and most people's experience is with problem solvers rather than with organizers. (A problem solver is someone with enough power or influence or connections to fix problems.) It may be the clergyman, the social worker, the politician, the patriarch on the block, or the leader of a traditional middle class ratepayers group — problem solvers are familiar to most people.

E. Issues

Multi-issued

Another unique feature of mass-based community organizing is that it demands working on several problems at the same time. Some people are always looking for that one big important issue. The reality is that *the* "big important issue" seldom comes along. And if it does, it can leave you without an organization once it is solved. So the objective should be to recognize that strength comes from working on many issues at the same time and taking on the big ones as they come.

F. Funding

Budget size

Mass-based community organizing is not something that can be accomplished by volunteers alone. Staff are required not only because of the skills needed but also because of the sheer size of the organization. That could mean a budget of from thirty to forty thousand dollars per year. An experienced organizer who is willing to work for a low salary puts the organization at a disadvantage in two ways: a low salary makes it difficult for the organization to hold him/her accountable and to expect much for his/her efforts; under such circumstances, the organizer is more like a volunteer.

Directly and
indirectly the
people pay

In the beginning of the organizing process, funding should be guaranteed for a two to three-year period to see the group through the initial crisis of credibility which is bound to come to effective organizing about the end of the first year.

Where does the money come from? One theory is that it should come primarily from the public and private institutions that local residents support. They contribute to churches, buy goods from business and industry and pay taxes to governments. Therefore, local people pay indirectly when their rightful share of those contributions, profits and taxes come back into the community to them. They hire the staff necessary to forge an instrument of their own so they can be effective in having more day to day control over their lives and communities. Local residents will usually contribute directly for the operational expenses of the organization especially as they discover that it pays to organize. Thus, directly and indirectly local people pay for their own organization.

G. Geographic Boundaries

One of the unique features of GRO is its size in area. It has defined geographic boundaries yet it is large enough to include at least 80,000 people.

H. Broad Based Organization

Another unique feature of GRO is that it is an organization whose membership is made up of many groups. It became that way by design. The reason for combining organizations instead of individuals together is precisely for the purposes of gaining strength — blocks are stronger than grains of sand. In other words, organization is the name of the game: an individual has to become organized to join.

Groups have
much power;
individuals don't

LAND USE IN RIVERDALE

Riverdale has the highest concentration of INDUSTRY of any area its size in Toronto — 270 companies.

There are two regional PARKS, five district parks and seven parkettes. There are no arenas or major recreation centres such as do the suburban and more affluent areas of Toronto.

Riverdale is characterized by ROW HOUSING. There are only five high rise buildings, two of which are owned by Ontario Housing Corporation. A third is a senior citizens tower privately owned.

There are BUSINESS strips along Danforth Avenue, Queen Street and portions of Broadview Ave. and Gerrard St.

When it comes to SCHOOLS in Riverdale there are 13 junior public, three senior public, eight secondary and four junior separate schools. They are two free schools.

Twenty-five to 30 CHURCHES serve Riverdale: five Roman Catholic, seven United, four Anglican, four Baptist, three Presbyterian and one or more each of Salvation Army, Church of God, Elim Fellowship and Jehovah's Witnesses. There is also a Temple for Sikhs in Ontario.

Some of the AGENCIES with offices in Riverdale are the Y.M. and Y.W.C.A., two community centres (one public, one community or private), a Family Service Association, Metro Children's Aid Society, Public Health, five Health Centres, three Homes for Boys, two for Girls and one for Coeds.

The Riverdale area covers almost all of Ward 8 and nearly half of WARD 7, represented, one may fairly say, by two old style and two reform style aldermen, respectively. (At the PROVINCIAL and FEDERAL levels, Riverdale is represented by the New Democratic Party.)

III PHILOSOPHY OF MASS BASED COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Basic problem is
powerlessness

The underlying philosophy of community organizing in GRO is that the frustrations in communities are caused not so much by the problems as by the powerlessness of local people. The philosophy also assumes that what is needed are means consistent with our democratic heritage, through which people can build some power to deal effectively with the problems that affect them. People organize because individually they do not have any kind of power and because they are fed up with outsiders controlling their lives.

Community
organizing develops
people

The community organizing process is inherently democratic. As such, it bears the fruits of the democratic process. One of the fruits is that it develops people's skills as they become competent in community organizing. Those involved, by having an opportunity to make decisions about their life, increase their dignity and self-respect. By experiencing a series of community victories, they enhance their self-image; and, by building and using power, create an antidote to apathy and an enrichment of their capacity to participate fully in the community.

Being able to act

Community improvement becomes a reality when people become interested and involved in their own problems. They will do this as they experience having the power to do something about them. What is happening in this process is that people are building a democratic process at the local level. They are starting to build some controls, some checks and balances at the local level. They are experiencing some measure of control over their own lives and communities. They are making democracy work not by tearing down the system but by building up the people. A local community without a community organization a la GRO is like a city without a council or a province without a legislature.

A re-distribution
of power

We have looked at the two-fold goal of community organizing, short term. The long range goal of mass based community organizing is the redistribution of power as powerless communities achieve some power. Established powers respond to each other. For example, when city hall wants to do something in "residential" Riverdale it usually does it *to* the people. But when it wants to do something in "corporate" Riverdale (i.e. something that would affect Colgate Palmolive or Lever Brothers) it usually does it *with* them. It is obvious that community organizing is achieving its goal in Riverdale in that it is bringing about basic change in Riverdale. As GRO becomes strong enough, city hall, for example, does what it needs to do in "residential" Riverdale *with* the people.

Effect of
becoming a power

It will be a new day when city hall cooperates because it really has no other choice, when and as officials and department heads have a respect for GRO created by the power of GRO just as they now have a respect for the power of Colgate Palmolive and Lever Brothers, and just as all three have to respect the power of city hall.

IV VIABILITY AND ADAPTABILITY

Eternally
possible and
necessary

Mass-based community organizing, a movement inspired by the work of Saul Alinsky, has its roots in the inner cores of large cities of post-industrial America but it is applicable all the way from Indian reservations to suburbia.

This style of organizing will be valid and possible as long as there is freedom of assembly; it will be necessary as long as there is human frailty. No political influence could change this. This would be true even in a nation of high rises, since its viability is determined not by class, or housing, but by issues.

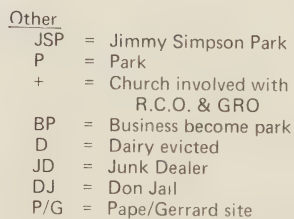
Mass-based community organizing has centered in geographically defined communities, but has proven equally adaptable to communities defined by interest.

Mass-based community organizing is people building their power by using issues relevant to themselves and their communities to build organization and the concomitant means of controlling their lives and communities. Such organizing requires issues, funding and a skilled staff director.

Map of Riverdale

HS

AVENUE



HS = High School
SP = Senior Public
JP = Junior Public
SS = Separate School

A = Agency
CC = Community Centre
L = Library
H = Hospital



APPENDIX II

Purpose and Policies of GRO (from its Constitution)

ARTICLE III

Purpose

“The purpose of this organization is to build, by just and democratic means, a grassroots organization representing all the people who live, work, worship or attend school in Riverdale, and to implement the decisions of its member groups”.

ARTICLE IV

Basic Policies

“GRO will protect the people from arbitrary decisions made outside the community.
GRO will grow and achieve a strong united community.
GRO is an independent non-profit, non-partisan organization.
GRO will not run, endorse or promote candidates for any political office, nor incur any obligation to any political party, officeholder or candidate.
GRO will work together to promote the legitimate interests of every organization in the community without regard to religion, national origin, colour or sex.
GRO will provide a forum for the free expression for the needs and aspirations of community groups and organize around these issues to achieve community goals.
GRO will provide to all segments of the community the opportunity to participate fully in the attainment of its goals through collective and unified actions.”

